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Sri Widati, PhD¹  and Amer Siddiq Amer Nordin, PhD^{1,2}

Dear Editor,

A silent, hidden pandemic lurks as the world grapples with the impact of COVID-19—the mental health pandemic of COVID-19. The latter is resultant of the impact of COVID-19 where lives lost, economies shattered, and people living in chronic and perpetual stress. The management of stress by individuals vary depending on their background and the community they live in,¹ however, is not helped by the misinformation, uncertainty, fear, household problems, and divorce shattering during this period.²

We report a study exploring the mental health situation of the Indonesian people during this pandemic using news articles in the online mass media. News related to mental health was collected between April 2020 to May 2021 for a period of one year. A list of terminology was listed and articles were separated accordingly. Content analysis was employed. For the one year studied, we found 63 articles reporting on mental health, where 52 (82.5%) of these were on advice on maintenance of positive mental health. One article described the state of mental health of Indonesians during the pandemic among 5661 respondents from 31 provinces across Indonesia; a survey conducted by the Association of Indonesian Mental Medicine Specialists (PDSKJI). Thirty-two percent reported psychological problems, where 67.4% and 67.3% had symptoms of anxiety and depression, respectively. Those who reported feeling depressed, 48% had thought of suicide or wanting to harm themselves. Notably, most participants were under 30 years of age and 74.2% of participants reported symptoms of psychological trauma.³

COVID-19 news particularly affected those who already have a history of mental illness such as anxiety or obsessive compulsive disorders (OCDs).⁴ Moreover, people with symptoms of depression during the COVID-19 pandemic was reported at 35% which is 5 to 6 times higher than the incidence of depression in the general population (Indonesia Basic Health Research in 2018) and 2 to 3 times higher than the incidence of depression in other nonpandemic disasters.⁵ Many people were also affected by posttraumatic conditions as a result of both untimely deaths (relatives, friends, or both parents dying at the same time), or because there was no one to accompany them due to the COVID-19 isolation.

The majority of Indonesian online media had attempted to mitigate this negative situation by providing information

and content to improve overall mental well-being. The media studied had attempted to educate the public about psychotic and nonpsychotic psychiatric disorders, provided tips on dealing with stress and mental health and, providing advice on how to talk to friends and families during this period. It was reported that through communication, in addition to the possibility of sharing our concerns with a trusted significant other, a closer relationship will ensue with that person.⁶ However, people still needed to filter what information they received to ensure that it is accurate, true, and balanced.

Our study reports on the mental health situation in Indonesia based on online news. The findings are concerning, and the government and professionals in Indonesia need to do more to assist in improving the situation better.

Author Note

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